898

WHITE LOTUS

THE

Legend of the Cat's Eye

ILLUSTRATIONS AND TEXT BY

CARLO DE FORNARO

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JEWELERS
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NEW YORK

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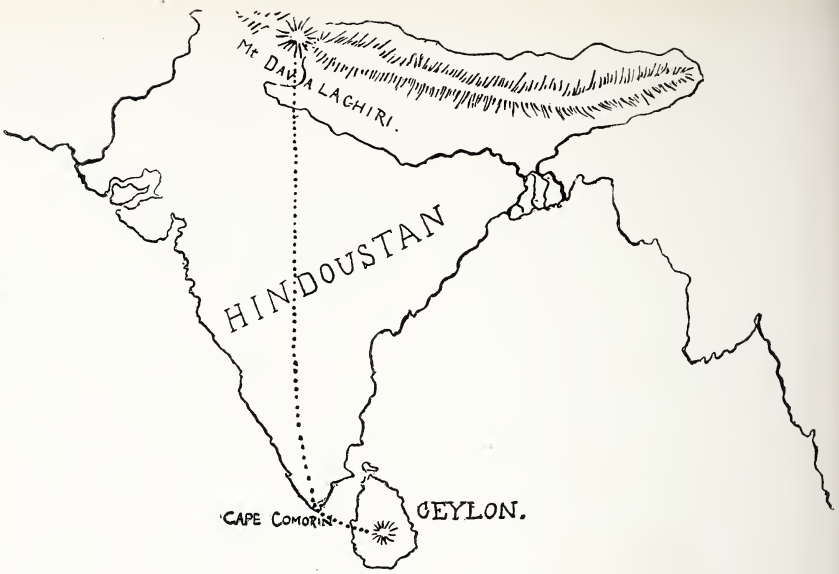
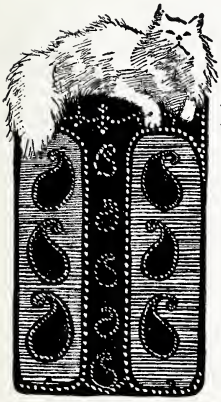
To

Miss Eugenie White


Mt DAVALACHIRI.
HINDOUSTAN
CAPE COMORIN
CEYLON.

Indra, the lover of girls, the husband of wives.

—Rig Veda.



THE great God Indra had once forgotten himself so far as to fall in love with a Princess of Mortal Blood.

It must be said in extenuation that she was of the bluest blood, so blue indeed that in comparison to it the sapphire would fade and grow pale; and so aristocratic and ancient was her royal lineage that the parchment on which the names of her ancestors were duly recorded would easily have stretched across the peninsula from Mount Davalaghiri to Cape Comorin, and

with a little tugging might easily have reached over to Ceylon as far as Adam's Peak.

Now the Ruler of the gods knew well enough that the Princess was unapproachable by men, no matter how exalted their rank. As a God he was invisible to mankind; therefore, to the great shock and indignation of the other gods and his wife Indrani, he took the incarnation of a beautiful Angora cat, as fluffy and delicate as a cotton puff, immaculately white, with a bushy tail, gray-green eyes, very bristling mustachios and a nose pink as a rose coral bead.

Then he dropped into the lap of the Rajah, the father of the Princess, as he was driving in state through the town.

"Surely this is a message from the gods, O Protector!" said humbly the Prime Minister. "Many moons has the Princess of all virtues wished for such a perfect specimen, and if the Protector will deign to utter the wish it will be presented to the Princess."

"Be it so," wearily said the Rajah.

Thus it happened that the Angora was incorporated into the royal household. The Princess took a violent fancy to White Lotus, as she named him; nothing was too exquisite or too rare for him, and he was much more important an individual than the Prime Minister or even her own mother.

Every morning three white-turbaned bearers would offer him a beautiful crystal bowl teeming with the fattest and most picturesquely variegated gold-fishes; then followed three other bearers, who, humbly salaaming, would present him a gorgeous silver bowl with milk from the fairest of Cashmere goats.

And while he was eating and drinking to his content, a numerous band of court musicians would softly play on stringed instruments.

When he had finished his repast, and while he was busy licking his paws, the court poet would appear and, salaaming profoundly, address him with befitting titles and denominations, which had

no limit but the poet's fervid imagination, and certain of which were:

"O Lord of the Milk!
Perfumed Almond Flower!
O Little Rajah of the Moon!
Whisper from the Milky Way!
Thou Pearl from the Green Sea!"

And the poet would further recite a neatly-turned sonnet in which he extolled his charms and beauty with a bold and daring simile that had to be invented every day anew. After all these ceremonies, court etiquette permitted him to enter the pavilion of the Princess, there to be petted and stroked by his fair admirer.

He would manifest his love to her the best way he could, by purring softly and gently and by rubbing his silken body under her bejeweled hand. When she grew tired of caressing and playing with him she would order her servants to bring one of her large jewel-chests. Out of it she would choose a bracelet for the slender neck

of White Lotus. One day it might be a bracelet inlaid with pearls, the next day perhaps one of rubies, the following emeralds, and then endless combinations and designs with the most astonishing variety of precious stones and gems, in rotation, for three hundred and sixty-five days in the year; and never did White Lotus wear the same ornament more than once.

Those were happy days for him, and he drank the cup of Delight, slowly, sipping it with the intensity and fervor of One Who Knew.

Their anger was great when the other gods saw how Indra had stooped so low as to fall in love with a common mortal and had furthermore impersonated a low, fish-eating animal; but, to their intense disgust, he seemed indifferent to their wounded feelings and his wife's jealousy; he appeared supremely happy and quite unconscious that time was flying and that he was still desecrating his high office by such behavior.

So they all met in council and agreed upon a

plan which would force him from his present condition and restore him to his state.

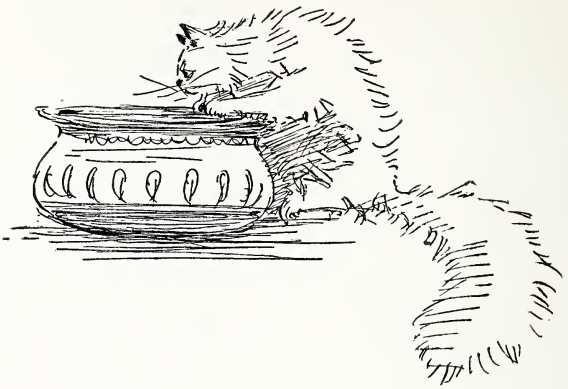
Next morning the Princess fell suddenly and dangerously ill. The most famous healers, quacks and doctors were summoned from the remotest corners of the peninsula, but all this was of small avail; she grew from bad to worse, until they all felt that mute Death could not be far away.

White Lotus in the meantime was in great anguish; helpless and lonely he wandered round the palace like a lost Soul in search of Paradise.

With a lover's intuition he had divined who was to blame for this insidious vengeance which was intended to wound him mortally.

After fruitless deliberation, he quickly ascended the highest tower in the palace, and from there demanded obedience from the mutinous gods; but he was only derided; then he invoked their kindness and mercy.

After a long silence a clear voice rang out from the sky above him: "Sacrifice for sacrifice, weep



seven times as the sun goes up and as the sun goes to rest, and those tears will save the Princess. . . ."

He returned to the palace, and there, in great sadness and hope, wept tears for the redemption of a precious life. The crystal bowl filled with his tepid tears was brought to the dying Princess, and she was sprinkled with them and ablution was performed.

This improved her condition, and the ablution was repeated in the morning and in the evening for seven days and seven nights until the Princess recovered and then called for her saviour.

But now poor White Lotus had wept his eyes out, and had to be carried lean and misshapen into the arms of the Princess, and there, with a last quiver, he nestled against her heart and died happy.

They burned him with royal honors, and great festivities followed.

When the Princess looked into the bowl she

saw the eyes of White Lotus staring at her from its depth; they were crystallized as if to perpetuate his love and sacrifice.

She had them set in a bracelet of gold and pearls, that she might look into his eyes as long as she lived.

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